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ABSTRACT

The failure to emphasize the role of education service agencies (ESAs) in metropolitan regions has lessened their use. Although in most states membership in an ESA system is obligatory for all school districts, participation in ESA programs and services is generally low. In several states legal constraints preclude a relationship between the ESA system and large urban districts. Several forces call for extensive cooperation among metropolitan units: the growing complexity of urban society, the need to administer education economically and efficiently, and the increasing sophistication of the legal definition of equal educational opportunity. The ESA concept attempts to strike a balance that centralizes some functions to achieve economies of scale and efficiency while supporting decentralization of other functions that ought to remain the responsibility of local jurisdictions. Five goals ought to be assumed by an ESA serving a metropolitan area: (1) contributing to educational equity, (2) contributing to fiscal equity, (3) contributing to educational improvement, (4) serving as the key coordinating agency for the educational community, and (5) serving as the lead advocate for education in the metropolitan region. (Author/WD)

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Educational Service Agencies in Metropolitan Areas

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES

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THE ROLE OF EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCIES IN METROPOLITAN AREAS

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American Association of School Administrators

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THE ROLE OF EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCIES IN METROPOLITAN AREAS

Introduction

Education planners and decision-makers in many states have in recent years opted for the establishment of a system of education service agency type organizations as the vehicle to improve the quality of educational services and as a way to create a more efficient and effective method of delivering services. Three basic forms of education service agencies (ESAs) are flourishing in this nation at the present time. These are:

- o Special District ESAs

  A legally constituted unit of school government setting between the state education agency (SEA) and a collection of LEAs. This pattern appears to be supported by the view that ESAs should be established by the state, or the state and local agencies acting in concert, to provide services for both the SEA and constituent LEAs.

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- o Regionalized SEA/ESAs

  A regional branch of the state education agency. This pattern appears to be supported by the view that ESAs should be established as arms of the state to deliver services for the SEA. Three variations of units of this type are in use: those providing administrative services only; those providing general or specialized instructional services; and, those providing administrative and instructional services.

- o Cooperative ESAs

  A loose consortium of local education agencies. This pattern appears to be supported by the view that ESAs should be established by two or more local education agencies to provide services exclusively to members of the consortium. Three variations of units of this type presently exist: those that are multi-purpose (provide a comprehensive number of services); limited-purpose (those that provide a small number of services); and, those that are single-purpose.

Eleven states have established a complete statewide system of Special District ESAs or include nearly all of their local education agencies (LEAs) in the state network (California, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin). These eleven networks are regarded to represent all of the state systems of this type operating in the nation at this time.

Five state education agencies (SEAs) have established either a single or multiple system of Regionalized SEA/ESAs. Massachusetts, North

Carolina, and Oklahoma have created a single service network. New Jersey and Ohio have two or more statewide networks. While many state education agencies have regularly decentralized some services and functions, the five states cited are regarded to represent the most extensive use of regionalized branches of the SEA to serve the entire state.

Educational cooperatives have also been in existence in a limited way in many regions of the country for a long period. However, some states have moved aggressively in recent years to formalize this practice. The most extensive development of cooperative ESAs at the present time is in the ten states of Alaska, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, Rhode Island, and West Virginia.

Types of Services Offered

The three types of service agencies exhibit both similarities and differences in the programs and services they offer. Taken as a group, education service agencies tend to offer services in six broad categories: direct instructional services to students enrolled in public LEAs, instructional support services offered to the staff of public LEAs, management services to public LEAs, services for the state education agency, and to a lesser extent, services to nonpublic schools and to agencies other than LEAs or the SEA. Major illustrations of the nature of programming activities offered in these six categories are provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1

SIX MAJOR CATEGORIES OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES OFFERED BY ESAs

Category #1	Category #2	Category #3	Category #4	Category #5	Category #6
Direct Instructional Services to Students Enrolled in Public LEAs	Instructional Support Services to Staff of Public LEAs	Management Services to Public LEAs	Services to the State Education Agency	Services to Nonpublic Schools	Services to Agencies Other Than LEAs and SEA
major illustrations	major illustrations	major illustrations	major illustrations	major illustrations	major illustrations
o education of handicapped children	o curriculum consultant	o purchasing	o media and library	o curriculum development	o adult education
o vocational/ occupational	o media and library	o data processing	o data processing	o media and library	o staff development
o pupil personnel	o information	o planning	o information	o staff development	o management services
o bilingual	o staff development	o research and development	o financial services	o data processing	
o migrant		o evaluation		o education of handicapped children	
o gifted/ talented		o information		o vocational/ occupational	
o outdoor/ environmental		o federal program coordination			
o adult education					

Programs for handicapped children and youth are offered by all three types of service units. Other highly ranked services by all three types include curriculum services, media and library services, staff development, and information services.

However, the Special District ESAs tend to have the most comprehensive services in all six categories. Few Regionalized SEA/ESAs offer direct instructional services to students enrolled in public or nonpublic schools. Prominent in the activities of these units are research and development services, planning services, and management services.

Cooperative ESAs, on the other hand, tend to concentrate on direct instructional services, especially for children with handicapping conditions, instructional support services, especially media and library services and staff development; and, a limited range of management services, most typically centralized purchasing.

Rationale for Program Patterns

While both similarities and differences in primary program emphasis exist between types of service agencies, a common rationale would appear to explain the programming patterns of units of whatever type. In part, this rationale can be explained by a number of common prerequisites of many of the programs offered such as "a required high degree of staff specialization or specialization of facilities and equipment, substantial start-up costs, or a required minimal student population.

Other important rationale developed by state and/or local planners for the use of service agencies appear to be:

- o a desire to improve the state-local partnership by facilitating the establishment of platforms for the resolution of state-substate-local interests and for the improvement of policy coordination and cooperation;
- o a desire to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of a statewide long-range planning capability, or statewide research, development, evaluation, and diffusion capability;
- o a desire to facilitate the best use of state and/or federal-state resources in delivering state and/or federal-state priorities;
- o a desire to facilitate the removal of inequities in local school district instructional programming due to limitations of enrollment or financial resources, other constraints;
- o equally significant, a desire to facilitate the improvement of the quality of LEA instructional programming; and,
- o a desire to facilitate the provision of high quality, efficient, and economical LEA management services.

Mission of ESAs in Metropolitan Areas

Many state planning efforts to create a system of education service agencies give special prominence to the benefits to be derived from the system for school districts in the nonmetropolitan regions of the state. Few cite gains to be realized by the use of ESAs in

metropolitan regions. This typical unequal emphasis may be a reflection of a prevailing assumption held by many in the professional community and by the public that collaboration between educational jurisdictions is most needed in nonmetropolitan regions where the concentration of students, and perhaps resources, is more difficult to achieve. The absence of an emphasis on the role of ESAs in metropolitan regions of a state, for whatever reason, has served to lessen the use of education service agencies in a majority of states where the concept is presently in use.

It is true that in a majority of state systems of ESAs all local education agencies, both large and small, are required to hold membership in the ESA serving their region. However, participation in the programs and services of the ESA is generally absent. Moreover, few states have implemented what are regarded to be meaningful fiscal, programming, or organizational incentives designed to promote the active involvement of large urban districts in particular in the affairs of ESAs or with other metropolitan LEAs through the ESA. While there are a number of notable instances of exemplary ESA and large urban district cooperation, these seem to be the exception rather than the rule. Where there is a relationship between the large urban district and an ESA, the relationship is frequently sporadic, single-purpose, or strained.

Moreover, in several states legal constraints preclude an ESA relationship with the very large urban districts. One state, New York, has explicitly excluded the five largest urban districts in the state from the state network of ESAs. Two other states, Nebraska and Pennsylvania, have in effect achieved the same result by designating their two largest urban districts as service agencies as well as local school districts.

The position is taken in this statement that ESAs have a vital role to play in solving educational issues in metropolitan regions and that the quality of educational practice in metropolitan centers would be materially enhanced if this role were to be most widely accepted.

Objective of the Statement

The objective of this statement, then, is to call attention to the important role that education service agencies can play in improving educational practice in metropolitan regions. The plan of the paper is to achieve this objective by examining the following central questions:

- why is a meaningful ESA role in metropolitan areas necessary?
- what is an appropriate ESA role?

WHY A MEANINGFUL ESA ROLE IN METROPOLITAN AREAS IS NECESSARY

Great cities have given way to metropolitan areas as the centers of American life in the late Twentieth Century. The great majority of people and economic activity in the United States is now concentrated in approximately 200 metropolitan areas, and much of the future growth in this nation is projected to take place in these regions.

The rapid pace of metropolitan growth poses many significant problems and challenges for metropolitan local school districts. There is a consensus that wide variations in educational practice exist in most metropolitan regions of the nation. Illustrative of the major discrepancies that frequently exist are:

- o differences in the scope and breadth of basic instructional programs for the general elementary secondary school age population
- o differences in the scope and breadth of basic instructional programs for special populations of elementary secondary school age children and youth
- o contrasts in the scope and breadth of instructional support services
- o resource imbalances
- o differentials in tax burdens for the support of education
- o contrasts in professional staff salaries
- o variations in the quality of facilities

Underlying many of these problems is the failure of governmental institutions, structured initially to serve a different era, to recognize or successfully implement needed changes, especially those which involve the growing interdependence of people and communities within metropolitan areas.

One of the fundamental metropolitan problems in education, then, is not that there are insurmountable difficulties in providing educational services or ameliorating social and economic disparities. Rather, it is, that school governments in metropolitan areas are often unable to cope with these issues because of the archaic structure of school government and the organizations and instrumentalities of school government.

Despite the obvious benefits of cooperative action by school government in metropolitan areas in resolving social and economic disparities, many local education agencies continue to go it alone. However, many important issues of public policy in education can no longer be handled by governmental units taking unilateral action, their legal or other structural and environmental features tend to be inadequate for solving problems which are areawide in scope.

Although few visualize the complete integration of units of school government in a metropolitan area in the near future, there are nonetheless, forces in operation in this country which are causing a re-examination of the concept of the total separation of school governments, particularly the central city and suburban districts, which typically characterize the present status. These forces, the major ones

which are cited below, will call for extensive cooperation among metropolitan units or an initial step in creating a more viable structure of school government:

- o the growing complexity of society in an urban setting which is reflected in the more universal acceptance of the concept that many of the issues in a metropolitan area are not the "problems of the city" or "the problems of the suburbs" but do in fact cut across artificial boundaries or other constraints which are the result of tradition, plenary legislative power, or indifference.
- o a greater realization that public services in general, and education in particular must be administered in the most efficient, effective and economical manner possible and a parallel lessening of tolerance for duplication, fragmentation, and lack of coordination among units of school government.
- o the increasing sophistication of the legal definition of equality of education opportunity and the growing awareness that the structure of school government in many instances is an important barrier to the attainment of this national priority.

The magnitude of the task facing metropolitan school district governments as they seek to improve educational practice requires that they give concentrated attention to cooperative and coordinative action. The development of new instrumentalities, for interlocal cooperation and coordination is a challenge heretofore unsurpassed in the history of the great American experiment in public education.

A healthy system of education service agencies has the potential to serve as the platform and advocate for cooperation among units of school government. Their use by planners and decision-makers would contribute to the resolution of many of the social and economic challenges confronting metropolitan education.

It is important to note that the use of education service agencies represents a balance in the reform efforts made to correct the problems of metropolitan education. It is not as ambitious as the consolidated school of thought that believes that the creation of a single, unified government for the metropolitan area is the most appropriate option for the efficient provision of high quality educational services. Rather, the ESA concept attempts to strike a balance that centralizes some functions to achieve economics of scale and increase efficiency and contributes to the equalization of educational opportunity while simultaneously arguing for the decentralization of others that ought to remain the responsibility of local jurisdictions, consistent with the best features of the concept of local control in education. Most importantly, the ESA concept attempts to establish a process for the meaningful debate and resolution of educational issues in metropolitan areas.

WHAT IS AN APPROPRIATE ESA ROLE IN METROPOLITAN AREAS?

Some who argue that the diverse needs and circumstances of metropolitan areas are so unlike that it is not possible to establish a universal role for an ESA in a metropolitan setting. While it is obvious that diversity characterizes metropolitan regions, many of the needs of schools in these regions, and their underlying causes are indeed so universal that it is possible to suggest the primary thrust of the activities of a metropolitan ESA while still allowing for flexibility. This section of the paper will suggest several over-arching goals that an ESA in any metropolitan center ought to contribute to, propose a set of criteria for use in allocating functions to the ESA, and conclude with illustrations of ways that an ESA can achieve attainment of its goals.

Over-Arching Goals of a Metropolitan ESA

The following five over-arching goals ought to be assumed by an ESA serving a metropolitan area:

- o contribute to the equalization of educational opportunity for both the general and special population of school age children and youth
- o contribute to the equalization of the financial burden for the support of education by offering services with efficiency and effectiveness

- o contribute to the improvement of the quality of educational practice
- o serve as the key coordinating agency for the educational community in the region
- o serve as the lead advocate for education in the metropolitan region

It is not suggested that the ESA be the sole agency involved in the attainment of each of the five goals. Few of the goals can be reached exclusively by the work of a single unit, an ESA or other. The five goals should be viewed as the primary domain in which the ESA should work, in most instances in collaboration with others.

Each of the goals represents a value system. To be useful, each should initially be given equal status even though attempts to implement each will likely result in conflict. Conflicting priorities and concerns of those charged with implementing the goals must of course be reconciled. Despite this difficulty, the five goals provide important direction and focus for determining the role of an ESA in a metropolitan setting. Among other benefits, their use serves as an important check on the specific programs and services that an ESA ought to assume or be requested to assume.

Criteria for Use in the Allocation of Functions to the Metropolitan ESA

Another critical step in the determination of the role and function of a metropolitan ESA is the development of criteria for the

assignment of functions to the ESA and to the local districts served by the unit. One of the most useful attempts made thus far in formulating criteria for use in assigning functions to different levels of government is that proposed by the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR). Four criteria are used in the ACIR proposal: as shown in Table 2 these are: economic efficiency, fiscal equity, political accountability, and administrative effectiveness.

The use of the ACIR approach is of value in furthering the debate concerning the appropriate role of an ESA. However, its use also presents difficulties. As was true of the preceding statement on over-arching goals, the four criteria reflect a set of values that must ultimately be reconciled. Nonetheless, their use ought to provide additional clarification concerning the role of an ESA.

Potential Ways to Achieve Goals

A large number of potential programs and activities are available to an ESA for the achievement of the five goals suggested previously. Major illustrations of ways that an ESA can accomplish each are cited below. The nature of ESA involvement in each will of course vary from limited to comprehensive depending on its legal authority to engage in the activity, availability of ESA resources, and the enrollment, fiscal, staff and facility limitations of local districts served by the unit.

TABLE 2

FOUR BASIC CHARACTERISTICS TO CONSIDER IN THE ASSIGNMENT OF GOVERNMENTAL FUNCTIONS BETWEEN JURISDICTIONS

1. Economic Efficiency: Functions should be assigned to jurisdictions
   a. that are large enough to realize economies of scale and small enough not to incur dis-economies of scale; (economies of scale)
   b. that are willing to provide alternative service offerings to their citizens and specific services within a price range and level of effectiveness acceptable to local citizenry; (service competition) and
   c. that adopt pricing policies for their functions whenever possible. (public pricing)

2. Fiscal Equity: Appropriate functions should be assigned to jurisdictions
   a. that are large enough to encompass the costs and benefits of a function or that are willing to compensate other jurisdictions for the service costs imposed or for benefits received by them; (economic externalities) and
   b. that have adequate fiscal capacity to finance their public service responsibilities and that are willing to implement measures that insure interpersonal and inter-jurisdictional fiscal equity in the performance of a function. (fiscal equalization)

3. Political Accountability: Functions should be assigned to jurisdictions
   a. that are controllable by, accessible to, and accountable to their residents in the performance of their public service responsibilities; (access and control) and
   b. that maximize the conditions and opportunities for active and productive citizen participation in the performance of a function. (citizen participation)

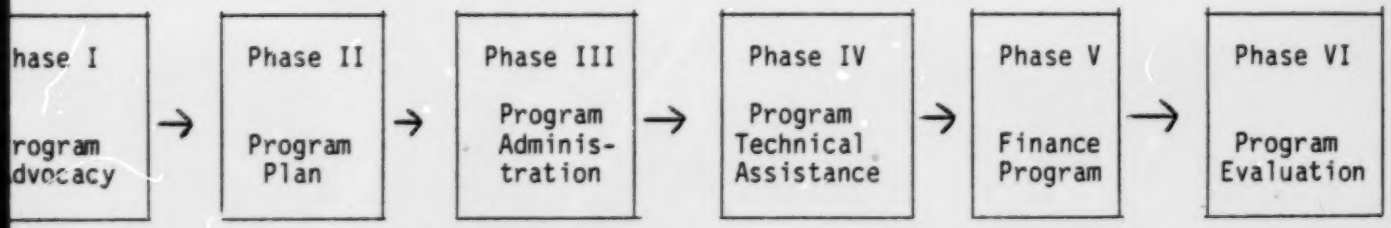
4. Administrative Effectiveness: Functions should be assigned to jurisdictions
   a. that are responsible for a wide variety of functions and that can balance competing functional interests; (general-purpose character)
   b. that encompass a geographic area adequate for effective performance of a function; (geographic adequacy)
   c. that explicitly determine the goals of and means of discharging public service responsibilities and that periodically reassess program goals in light of performance standards; (management capabilities)
   d. that are willing to pursue intergovernmental policies for promoting inter-local functional cooperation and reducing inter-local functional conflict; (intergovernmental flexibility) and
   e. that have adequate legal authority to perform a function and rely on it in administering the function. (legal adequacy)

SOURCE: Governmental Functions and Processes: Local and Areawide, Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, Washington, D.C., February, 1974, pp. 7-11.

Moreover, the nature of the ESA role in each of the illustrations cited will likely vary according to the degree of involvement in different aspects of the delivery of the services or activities. One useful way to illustrate this point is through use of the six phases of programming shown in Figure 1. All six phases are critical for the successful completion of a service and thus all are important for the attainment of an ESA goal and should not be minimized.

Figure 1

Six Phases of ESA Involvement in Programming



Illustrations of major ways that an ESA can achieve attainment of its first over-arching goal of contributing to the equalization of educational opportunity for both the general and special populations of school age children and youth enrolled in public, and where legally required or permissable, nonpublic schools are:

- o instructional programs for handicapped children and youth
- o instructional programs in vocational/technical education
- o pupil personnel services
- o instructional programs in bilingual education
- o instructional programs for the gifted/talented
- o instructional programs in driver education
- o instructional programs in outdoor education
- o maintain satellite centers in close proximity to students

Illustrations of major ways that an ESA can achieve attainment of its second over-arching goal of contributing to the equilization of the financial burden for the support of education in metropolitan areas are:

- o use of general taxing authority based on the wealth of local units to support all ESA operations
- o use of categorical taxing authority based on the wealth of local units to support specific ESA activities
- o use of differentials for allocating costs for ESA services that reflect the wealth of local units

Illustrations of major ways that an ESA can achieve attainment of its third over-arching goal of contributing to the quality of educational practice for public, and where legally required or permissable, nonpublic schools are:

- o pupil diagnosis/prescription services
- o curriculum consultant services
- o instructional media services
- o computer services
- o test development, scoring, and analysis services
- o staff development services
- o planning services
- o research and development services
- o data processing management services
- o management information services
- o federal program coordination services
- o legal services
- o staff certification services
- o collective negotiations services
- o transportation services
- o purchasing services

Illustrations of major ways that an ESA can achieve attainment of its fourth over-arching goal of serving as the key coordinating agency in the metropolitan area are:

- o maintain, publish, and disseminate areawide profiles of educational institutions and regional characteristics and trends

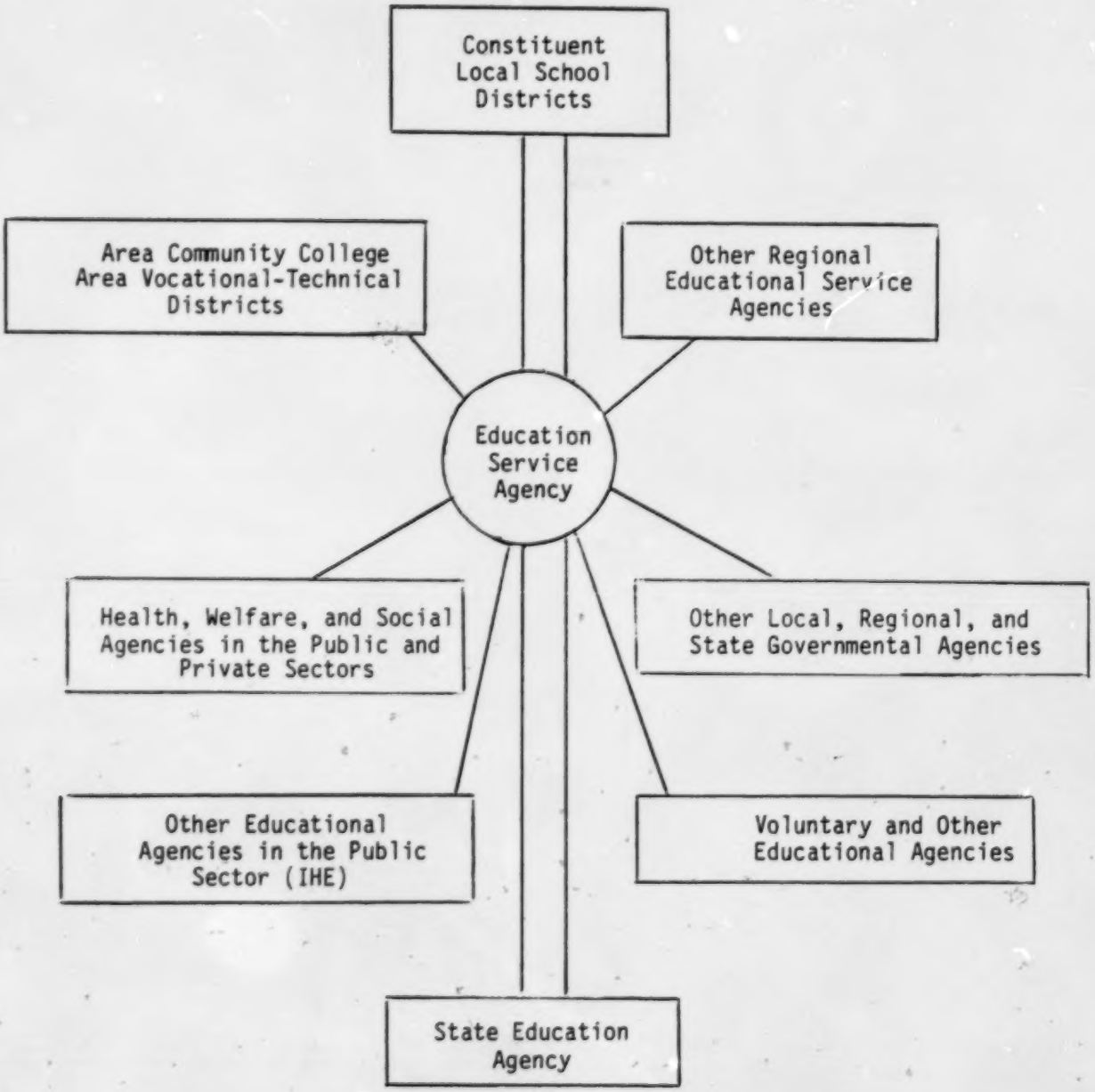
- o serve as the depository for reports published by educational and other agencies and access the depository to the professional community and public
- o maintain permanent and ad hoc advisory groups representative of the full spectrum of the educational community
- o maintain permanent and ad hoc advisory groups representative of all other regional interests having a primary or secondary interest in education

Illustrations of major ways that an ESA can achieve attainment of its fifth over-arching goal of serving as the advocate for education in the metropolitan area are:

- o publish and disseminate state of the art reports on educational matters
- o sponsor state of the art conferences, forums, symposia, and workshops on educational matters for representatives of the education community, other regional interest groups, and state and federal agencies

FIGURE 2

POTENTIAL CONSTITUENTS
OF AN ESA


Constituent Local School Districts
Area Community College Area Vocational-Technical Districts
Other Regional Educational Service Agencies
Education Service Agency
Health, Welfare, and Social Agencies in the Public and Private Sectors
Other Local, Regional, and State Governmental Agencies
Other Educational Agencies in the Public Sector (IHE)
Voluntary and Other Educational Agencies
State Education Agency

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The challenges facing education in metropolitan areas are pervasive and call for immediate response by the educational community. Education service agencies are a vital alternative for resolving many of the issues that are areawide in scope while preserving the autonomy of local education agencies. Their use can facilitate the aggregation of resources, for the equalization of educational opportunity, promote efficiency in the delivery of educational services, and improve the quality of educational practice. Equally important, ESAs can serve as the platform for addressing areawide issues and be an advocate for corrective measures. All of these roles are essential for preservation of the highest ideals of public education in this nation.